

VZCZCXRO3350

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #2277/01 2041430

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 221430Z JUL 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8425

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002277

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER IR IZ

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF I-ESC IN QUESTION

Classified By: Economic Minister Charles Ries. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The National Security Adviser (NSA) formally proposed that the Prime Minister dissolve the weekly Baghdad-focused "Executive Steering Committee" (I-ESC) meeting of service ministries and senior coalition representatives. The NSA plan is to replace the I-ESC with an expanded forum on post-kinetic essential services and reconstruction in Basra, Mosul, Maysan, and Baghdad. The NSA's office decided to take this action after the PM told the NSA the I-ESC had become too "routine," and canceled five consecutive meetings. The I-ESC Secretariat told us the Prime Minister accepted the proposal on July 3, but subsequently returned it to the NSA's office, requesting further studies on the nature of the forum. I-ESC is suspended pending the submission of this study. End Summary.

MALIKI REPORTEDLY CALLS I-ESC "ENDLESS, WITHOUT REASON"

¶2. (C) Saeed Al-Jaiashy of the Iraq Executive Steering Committee (I-ESC) Secretariat told us on July 2 that National Security Adviser (NSA) Muwafuk Rubaie formally proposed that Prime Minister Maliki scrap the I-ESC and replace it with a new forum to focus on post-kinetic essential services and reconstruction throughout the country. Saeed said the NSA's office decided to take this action after the PM told Rubaie the I-ESC had become too "routine" and was no longer necessary. On July 13, Al-Jaiashy reported the PM had sent the proposal back to the NSA's office, asking for a "deeper" study, adding that the PM wrote the I-ESC was "endless and without reason" on the returned proposal. The NSA's office is currently undertaking the study, which seeks to define responsibilities of the committee members, decide whether the forum should conduct project execution or merely assessment, and determine the limits of civil-military coordination. The I-ESC is suspended pending the submission of this study. The last I-ESC meeting took place on May 23, with the PM's office canceling the five subsequent meetings, often on short notice.

¶3. (C) According to Al-Jaiashy, the proposed national level forum would expand the GOI focus from exclusively Baghdad to the provinces of Basra, Mosul, and Maysan. The forum might subsequently expand from the four provinces to other areas, as large-scale Iraqi army operations allow for the return of services. He said security concerns have stalled over 60 reconstruction projects throughout Iraq, and this new meeting could help coordinate security efforts to support the restart of these initiatives. He also stressed the need for the Iraqi Army to cede control of areas to Iraqi Police as soon as possible and said the new meeting would help facilitate that as well. The new forum would meet on a bi-weekly basis, as opposed to the weekly I-ESC format, but similarly include the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, the NSA, and other ministries involved with essential services in the four focus provinces. Al-Jaiashy said USG participation in the

meeting would be welcome.

I-ESC BACKGROUND

-----

¶4. (U) The GOI established the I-ESC as a forum for the Prime Minister and senior cabinet members to make strategic decisions in support of "Fardh al-Qanoon," the Baghdad Security Plan. I-ESC discussions encompassed varied subject matters, such as economics, security, politics, and essential services, as such topics related to Baghdad. In addition to cabinet members, I-ESC participants included local leaders such as the Provincial Council Chairman, the Mayor's Office, and the Governor's Office. Ambassador Crocker, Economic Minister Charles Ries, Commanding General Petraeus, and other senior MNF-I officers often represented MNF-I and the Embassy at the weekly I-ESC. A weekly "Deputy I-ESC" meeting identified future agenda topics, with input from Embassy and MNF-I personnel. Six I-ESC "Supporting Committees," such as the Essential Services Committee chaired by Ahmed Chalabi, also met to address concerns in specific areas.

COMMENT

-----

¶5. (C) We are not surprised by the dissolution of the I-ESC. The Prime Minister has questioned its utility before. Over the past few months, he disbanded the supporting committees, reduced the scope and members of the Deputy I-ESC, and limited USG participation in the weekly I-ESC. Cabinet members have appeared at times to grow impatient of having to involve themselves so closely in local issues or defend

BAGHDAD 00002277 002 OF 002

themselves in open sessions. That said, the I-ESC has proven successful in keeping the GOI focused on strategic issues in Baghdad, while holding local officials and ministers accountable to the PM. In addition, our active participation in the Deputy I-ESC offered the opportunity for the USG to shape the agenda of the I-ESC. Our representation in the I-ESC then gave us the chance to engage the highest levels of the GOI on these issues. While the post-kinetic reconstruction challenges facing Baghdad, especially with regard to Sadr City reconstruction, are far from resolution, the new meeting format might reinvigorate the forum and help ensure the GOI not lose sight of the importance of "winning the peace."

CROCKER